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but it is hoped that the facts given so roughly in the present paper will induce others, more competent than myself, to take up the subject.

The best wishes of the author will be attained, if the facts now brought forward are instrumental in adding one link to the safeguard of society.

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*The Epidemiological Society: its Views and Objects.*

By J. O. McWILLIAM, M.D., R.N., F.R.S.

WHETHER we look back into the past history of those pestilences by which, in former times, England has been visited, or more immediately realize the extensive and fatal prevalence of epidemic diseases during late years, we cannot but be surprised that an Epidemiological Society in this country is only of to-day's creation.

Without, however, dwelling on the past, I would observe, as regards the future, that a Society especially devoted to the investigation of epidemic diseases, if properly supported and efficiently managed, cannot fail to exert a marked and beneficial influence on the right direction of such measures as may be adopted for the promotion of public health.

That the class of diseases included in the general term "epidemic" demands a distinct and systematic inquiry, conducted in a comprehensive and philosophic spirit, is a proposition that hardly needs being urged at the present day. If, however, any argument for the necessity of such an investigation were wanting, it is to be found in the emphatic statements which appear in the remarks introductory to the "Objects" of the Epidemiological Society, when we find that "the yearly average number of deaths in England alone from zymotic affections, in the five years 1838-42, amounted to 67,345, or 19 per cent. of the total annual mortality from all specific causes; whilst, as far as London is concerned, the deaths from zymotic diseases in 1848 amounted (exclusively of the cholera deaths in that year) to 17,634—a number exceeding by 3,033 the total deaths in the metropolis from cholera during the whole of the late epidemic."

As having an immediate and forcible bearing on this important question, I cannot do better than advert to the striking and instructive results of Professor Christison's elaborate examination

of the deaths among the Assured of the Standard Life Assurance Office during the last five years. I cannot too earnestly direct the attention of my readers to the statements of the distinguished Edinburgh Professor, feeling assured that they are not mere suppositions or vague speculations, but the legitimate conclusions of a cautious and patient investigation into a large assemblage of well ascertained facts :—

“The next head, ‘Deaths from Fever, Malignant Cholera, Scarlet Fever, and other *Epidemic and Infectious Diseases*,’” said the learned Professor, “is a numerous one in this list ; because, as every one knows, Scotland and Ireland in particular have been visited during the last five years by a severe epidemic of cholera, and a much worse one of typhus fever. Of 291 deaths, no fewer than 67 have died from diseases of this class, and 55 of them from typhus and cholera alone. These 55 may be considered in a great measure as an extra loss ; *for, in all probability, proper sanitary measures would have prevented them.* This is a very important matter for the consideration of all Assurance Companies ; for, contrary to what has been thought by many, typhus and cholera do not seem, as in all epidemics, to attack chiefly the feeble and unsound, so as merely to cut off a little sooner those who would perish at any rate at no distant period by ordinary diseases at large,—no less than 17 out of 20 deaths from cholera, and nearly the same proportion among those from fever, have occurred among what would undoubtedly be considered by every one as *select* lives. Another serious consideration is, that most deaths from these causes occur early in life, and consequently, in general, very soon after assurance is effected.”

Hence it is but too evident that the destructive course of epidemic and infectious diseases in this country is one onward and certain, not only as observed in the occasional sweeping and desolating march of cholera or influenza, but also in the constant, although comparatively silent, yet far more fatal progress of other diseases, of which the public in general hear but little.

When Professor Christison brought forward his important facts at the late general meeting of the Standard Office, it was well observed by one of the Directors, that “without the valuable aid of the medical officers no Office could succeed ;” and that “unless they did their duty well and faithfully, Life Assurance would be a most precarious business.” Another gentleman, on the same occasion, alluding to the statistical results of Dr. Christison, said, “when we find that so large a proportion as 20 per cent. of the

deaths arise from epidemic disease, I think it behoves us to give increased attention to sanitary subjects for the future ; because we may be certain that the greater the progress made in that direction, the more favourable will be the results of Life Assurance."

These observations are full of practical wisdom. They bespeak an enlarged and proper view of the value of medical science as an element in the system of Life Assurance :—a view that does not limit the usefulness of the medical officer to the mere selection of eligible lives, but which also recognizes in well-directed sanitary legislation a means of mitigating, if not of obviating, those evils which are constantly operating to the destruction of human life.

The objects which the Epidemiological Society have in view are briefly but comprehensively stated in the following passage of Dr. Babington's eloquent introductory address at the opening meeting of the Society in December last : "To endeavour," said Dr. Babington, "by the light of modern science, to review all those causes which result in the manifestation and spread of epidemic diseases ; to discover the cause at present unknown, and investigate those which are at present ill understood ; to collect together facts on which scientific researches may be securely based ; to remove errors which impede their progress ; and thus, as far as we are able, having made ourselves acquainted with the strongholds of our enemies, and their modes of attack, to suggest those means by which their invasion may either be prevented, or, if in spite of our resistance they have broken in upon us, to seek how they may be most effectually combated and expelled."

Four Committees of this Society are already actively engaged in investigating the following important subjects :—

1. The facts connected with small-pox and vaccination.
2. The condition of common lodging-houses as influencing the propagation and spread of epidemic diseases.
3. The epidemic diseases prevalent in public hospitals.
4. Epizootic diseases, more especially those affecting domestic animals.

It is upon such grounds, and with the possession of such claims, that I venture to bring the Epidemiological Society under the notice of the readers of this magazine, more especially of those interested in Life Assurance, and earnestly recommend its beneficent objects to their attention and cordial support.

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